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Title:

Comments: I completely support this project. I am a researcher studying wildlife populations in the Chattahoochee National Forest and I can attest to the issues of current forest health. Large-scale forest management is something that has been long overdue in this region. The forest understory is depleted in a large portion of the national forest due to lack of sunlight and homogeneous habitat. A diverse understory is an important source of food and cover for wildlife, but is severely lacking under the forest's current condition. Wildlife populations such as deer, turkey, ruffed grouse, and other song birds that depend on habitat heterogeneity have declined as a result. There is also a growing wildfire hazard in this forest, specifically in the overstocked pine stands. A high abundance of natural tree death due to overcrowding in the canopy has made these stands a tinder box just waiting for a spark. We need to learn from the wildfires that occurred in Gatlinburg, TN and California. Natural fires did occur in this forest in extended intervals. Native Americans also purposely set fire to these areas historically to promote wildlife and overall forest health. We have largely extinguished this management action in recent decades, suppressing natural occurrences. We have a 98% mature forest with declining wildlife populations and an increasing fire fuel load as a result. I fully support this action and I hope stakeholders realize this is to the benefit of all hunters, anglers, hikers, campers, and bird-watchers alike.